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ABSTRACT

Oklahoma's three-tiered system of higher education provides access for all students, with the comprehensive universities requiring the highest standards, regional universities requiring less restrictive standards, and the two-year colleges having open door access. The various tiers help students match their level of academic preparation to the appropriate learning environment necessary for college success. Every two years, the State Regents publish the "Admission Policy Impact Study" as part of a policy evaluation process. During the late 1980s, Oklahoma's student academic performance lagged behind that of other regional states. This paper outlines the State Regents' comprehensive efforts to accelerate positive academic change to Oklahoma's higher education system with a combination of strengthened admission/retention and assessment standards. It concludes with student performance information, from 1987-88 through 1997-98, that indicates a favorable systemwide impact. (EV)

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OKLAHOMA HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS ADMISSION/RETENTION/ASSESSMENT:

Reasons Standards Were Strengthened
Enhancing Student Preparation for College
Improving College Student Performance
Indicators of Positive Student Performance

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OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education: Admission/Retention and Assessment Standards Summary

PREFACE

Oklahoma's three-tiered system of higher education provides access for all students with the comprehensive universities requiring the highest standards, regional universities requiring less restrictive standards, and the two-year colleges having open door access. The various tiers help students match their level of academic preparation to the appropriate learning environment necessary for college success. Every two years, the State Regents publish the *Admission Policy Impact Study* as part of the policy evaluation process. Data from the 1998 study appear in this summary.

During the late 1980s, Oklahoma's student academic performance lagged behind that of other regional states. This summary outlines the State Regents' comprehensive efforts to accelerate positive academic change to Oklahoma's higher education system with a combination of strengthened admission/retention and assessment standards. It concludes with student performance information ranging from 1987-88 through 1997-98 that indicates a favorable systemwide impact.

THE PROBLEM: LAGGING PERFORMANCE DURING THE LATE 1980s

POOR REGIONAL COMPARISON, 1987-88

- OU and OSU had the lowest average ACT scores among Big 8 freshmen, 21 and 20.1 respectively, while scores among the remaining Big 8 universities averaged 22.5.
- The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University had the highest freshman dropout rates in the Big 8 Conference, 34% and 39% respectively.
- OU and OSU also had the lowest graduation rates in the Big 8, 38% each, compared to a range of 42% to 57% for other Big 8 Universities.

INADEQUATE COLLEGE PREPARATION

- Only 30% of Oklahoma college-bound high school seniors were taking the 13 ACT-prescribed high school courses for college preparation.
- The average Oklahoma ACT score was 19.9, which was 0.9 points below the national average of 20.8.
- In fall 1987, 39% of Oklahoma comprehensive and regional university freshmen did not return to their institutions for their sophomore year.
- Oklahoma-entering college freshmen who are academically unprepared for college-level courses cost taxpayers twice: first through funding high school instruction and again through funding college remedial courses. Taxpayers paid 79% of college costs in 1987-1988 and 74% in 1998-99.

STUDENT-TO-COLLEGE MISMATCHES, 1987-88

- During 1987-88, university professors testified at public hearings that current admission standards resulted in such a broad spectrum of student ability within one class that instructors were forced to teach to the "middle ability," leaving many students bored while others were left behind.

- In 1987, 5% more students were transferring from Oklahoma universities to the state's two-year colleges than were transferring into universities from two-year colleges.

- In 1987-1988 Oklahoma college and university freshman dropouts cost Oklahoma taxpayers millions of dollars.

INDUCING CHANGE: A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY APPROACH

STRENGTHENING QUALITY AND BROADENING ACCESS

Enhancing Student Preparation for College

- 1988: The State Regents adopted a phase-in of increased admission standards at the comprehensive and regional institutions. Entering students are required to score higher on the ACT or earn better grades in high school to enroll at either of these two tiers. These higher standards encourage high school students to take more academic core subjects.

- 1991: Broadening student access, the State Regents approved additional Right-to-Try Admission Opportunities for students who do not meet the regular admission requirements.

  1. The Summer Admission Performance Program permits students who have not satisfied the ACT or high school class performance requirements to attain admission at a comprehensive or regional university with summer course work if they meet specified minimal performance standards. To qualify, students must have a minimum composite ACT score of 18 for comprehensive universities and 17 for regional universities OR a minimum high school GPA of 2.5.

  2. The Summer Curricular Deficiency Program permits students who have two or less high school course deficiencies to attain entry to a regional university by successfully completing the relative summer course work.

  3. With Alternative Admission, universities may admit up to 8% of freshmen or 50 freshmen (whichever is higher) who do not meet the admission criteria.

  4. The adult admission category permits: 1) Students 21 years of age and older or on active military to be eligible for admission to any system institution based on criteria established at the campus, and 2) non-high school graduates whose high school class has graduated and who have participated in the ACT or SAT are eligible for open admission to any two-year college.

  5. Using the Student Transfer option, students who previously did not meet a university's performance or curricular admission standards can be admitted once they perform at a "C" average or above for a specified time at a two-year college and satisfy all curricular deficiencies. Low performers may still enter through the Transfer Probation option.

- 1991: The State Regents approved a comprehensive student assessment policy with entry-level assessment. Entering students must demonstrate the learning competencies that

should be acquired in high school--score at least a 19 on ACT subject tests or pass institutional tests. If unsuccessful, students must take remedial courses. This policy encourages high school students to perform well in their core classes.

- 1992: Combining college admission access and quality, the State Regents, with legislative support, approved a policy for the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program (OHLAP). It offers low-income youths academic scholarships if they complete a challenging college preparation curriculum.

- 1992-1996: To complement strengthened admission standards, the State Regents organized a systemwide external review of teacher education programs in Oklahoma and implemented the resulting recommendations. In 1996, the State Regents expanded subject matter preparation for elementary, early childhood, and special education teachers to 12 credit hours for four core subjects: English, mathematics, sciences, and social sciences. A minimal foreign language competency for all teacher education graduates was also established, and program admission standards for all teacher education candidates were strengthened.

- 1993: State Regents adopted a three-part-package to enhance students' college preparation.

  1) Faculty members representing all system institutions developed learning competencies in mathematics, English, science, and history that high school students require to be successful in college. Broad distribution of this information to high schools helps establish greater continuity of curriculum from high school to college.

  2) The State Regents set a system standardized score to determine academic subject preparation for college and made remediation mandatory for students inadequately prepared.

  3) The State Regents increased the high school core curricular requirements from 11 to 15 courses, effective fall 1997.

- 1993: Reinforcing the new admission standards with student preparation measures, the State Regents initiated the Oklahoma Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS). A cooperative effort between the State Regents, ACT, and secondary schools; EPAS assesses 8th and 10th grade students to monitor their academic preparation for college so adjustments can be made well before they enter college. Colleges and universities also report college student performance data to their respective feeder high schools to improve student preparation.

- 1996: Effective fall 1997, high school students who concurrently enrolled in college/university courses needed to meet increased admission and assessment standards. For the first time two-year colleges adopted a minimum ACT cut score (19) and secondary, institutional testing was no longer permitted.

- 1999: Effective before fall 2000, the State Regents expanded student incentives to take academically challenging high school courses by creating a third admission option whereby students earning a minimum average GPA in the State Regents' 15-unit core could be eligible for admission to comprehensive (3.0 GPA) and regional (2.7 GPA) universities. This option includes a student incentive to take Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. In addition the State Regents strengthened the curricular requirements for admission: 1) requiring a writing component for all English courses, and 2) recommending an additional unit of mathematics and an additional unit of lab science.

- 1999: Effective before fall 2000, the State Regents approved a second high school performance admission option for concurrent enrollment to complement the standardized minimum ACT test scores option. It permits high school seniors earning a minimum GPA and class rank (differentiated by tier) to be eligible for admission. The second admission option for Juniors is a minimum 3.5 GPA,for all tiers.

- 1999: The State Regents approved ACT's *Standards of Transition* as the State System's reference source for the skills and knowledge expected of graduating high school students wanting to enroll in college. The Standards are more closely linked to the System's EPAS program. They replaces the "Student Competencies for College Success" adopted as part of the 1993 three-part package,

Improving College Student Performance

- 1991: Working to enhance instructional improvement and institutional accountability, the State Regents approved a comprehensive student assessment policy with four levels. In addition to the 1) entry-level assessment used for student placement, institutions must perform 2) mid-level student assessment, 3) program outcomes assessment, and 4) student satisfaction assessment. Institutions annually report the performance of their general education programs (reading, writing, math, critical thinking) with mid-level assessment; report how well students meet degree program goals through outcomes assessment; and report student opinions of programs and services with the student satisfaction assessment.

- 1991: The State Regents established higher retention standards. With emphasis placed on prompt notice of academic difficulty, students are notified much earlier in their academic careers that they are performing below the level that will lead to graduation. Successive strengthening of the policy standards since fall 1991 enables students to recover more quickly and remain in college on a successful track.

- 1991: To introduce struggling students to different academic environments and to keep them in college, the retention standards encourage institutions to develop special admission procedures for students academically suspended from other system institutions and encourages institutions to provide appropriate academic support services for students experiencing academic difficulties.

- 1992: Linking access measures to the new retention standards, the State Regents added forgiveness provisions to the grading policy that provide students with options for raising their retention GPAs so that they can remain in college on a graduation track. The provisions permit students to repeat course work or have whole semesters reprieved.

INDICATORS OF POSITIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

STUDENT PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE

- More students are taking the ACT 13-unit core curriculum (4 units-English, 3 units-math, 3 units-social studies, 3 units-sciences) [Table, B].

- High school students' ACT composite scores are rising at a faster rate than the national average (Table, C).

- Freshmen are better prepared for college level work.

1) A greater proportion of first-time-entering freshmen attained ACT composite scores at or above 21 at comprehensive universities and at or above 19 at regional universities (Table, D and E).

2) In fall 1997, Oklahoma public colleges and universities enrolled 284 percent more freshman National Merit Scholars than in 1987 (Table, F).

3) Remediation levels for freshmen admitted to college directly from high school are declining (Table, G).

- Minority first-time-entering freshman enrollment is up from 1987 (Table, I).

COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS

- Lower Student Dropout Rates.

  The system and institutional freshman dropout rates for all tiers declined from fall 1986 to fall 1997 (Table, L and N).

- Higher Graduation Rates.

  Even though many students benefiting from the strengthened student preparation measures have not yet completed the six-year graduation cycle used for rate analysis, the graduation rates of selected groups of first-time-entering freshmen completing a baccalaureate degree within six years rose nine percentage points at comprehensive universities from 1991 to 1997 (Table, Q).

- The number of degrees institutions awarded increased over the last 15 years (Table, S and T).

- College student success of future teachers, in turn, also improves student preparation for college. *Education Week* (Jan. 8, 1998) ranked Oklahoma first of the 50 states in standards for teacher quality.

DEVELOPING OKLAHOMA'S STUDENT TALENT: INCREASING DEGREE ATTAINMENT AMONG OKLAHOMANS

Strengthening admission and retention standards is just a first step. Oklahoma still lags behind the nation in the degree attainment of citizens 25 years and older. Therefore, the State Regents aggressively reinforce system admission standards with a comprehensive student preparation strategy designed to equitably lift all students' performance levels. The 1999 *Brain Gain 2010: Building Oklahoma Through Intellectual Power* lists student preparation strategies that include additional recommended courses in math and science, strengthened college-to-high school information feedback systems, and support for a statewide high school, performance-based scholarship program.

Oklahoma State System of Higher Education
Student Profiles

	Student Preparation Profile	1987	1997	Difference		
A.	Percent of College-Bound High Schools Seniors Taking the ACT Test	54%	72%	+	18	percentage points
B.	Percent of College-Bound High Schools Seniors Taking the ACT 13-Unit Core Curriculum	30%	53%	+	23	percentage points
C.	Average ACT Scores					
	National Average	20 8	21.0	+	0.2	point

	Oklahoma High School Seniors	19.9	20.6	+	0.7	point
D.	Comprehensive Tier Freshmen with ACT=>21*	59%	83%	+	24	percentage points
E.	Regional Tier Freshmen with ACT=>19	42%	66%	+	24	percentage points
F.	Number of Freshman National Merit Scholars Enrolled in Oklahoma Institutions	45	173	+	128	students
G.	Remediation of First-Time Freshmen Admitted Directly to College from High School	42% (Fall 94)	34% (Fall 97)	-	8	percentage points
	Fall Enrollment Profile	**1987**	**1997**		**Difference**	
H.	Total Fall Enrollment	151,030	152,972	+	1,942	students
I.	Minority Freshman Student Enrollment	17%	26%	+	9	percentage points
J.	White Freshman Student Enrollment	83%	74%	-	9	percentage points
K.	Mean Age of Freshmen	23.3	23.4	+	0.1	year
	College Performance Profile					
	Dropout Rates: First-Time Freshmen	**1986**	**1997**		**Difference**	
	Within the State System					
L.	Comprehensive and Regional Universities	23%	17%	-	6	percentage points
M.	Two-Year Colleges	35%	34%	-	1	percentage point
	Within the Tier					
N.	Comprehensive and Regional Universities	39%	30%	-	9	percentage points
O.	Two-Year Colleges	43%	41%	-	2	percentage points
	Graduation Rates Within the State System**	**1991**	**1997**		**Difference**	
P.	Comprehensive and Regional Universities	36%	41%	+	5	percentage points
Q.	Comprehensive Universities	42%	51%	+	9	percentage points
R.	Regional Universities	30%	32%	+	2	percentage points
	Degrees Awarded	**1982-83**	**1996-97**		**Difference**	
S.	Number of Associate Degrees	4,646	6,547	+	1,901	degrees
T.	Number of Baccalaureate Degrees	10,459	12,840	+	2,381	degrees

* ACT minimum score for admission to the comprehensive universities increased from 21 to 22 in fall 1996.

** 1985 and 1991 first-time freshmen at the comprehensive and regional universities who completed a baccalaureate degree in the State System within six years.

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